

A plot review of Edgar Allan Poe's masterpiece

# **“Tell-Tale Heart”**

## **Story Map Answers**

# SETTING (Time + Place)

- PAST: The action of the tale takes place in the house the narrator shares with the old man.
  - PRESENT: At the same time, the narrator is telling the story from either **a prison or an insane asylum** where he has been incarcerated (those are just 2 possible answers).
- PAST + PRESENT: But even more importantly, **the setting is actually inside the obsessed mind of the narrator** himself, for the crucial climactic event of the story—his hearing the beating of the dead man's heart—take place solely within his own tortured imagination.

# MOOD

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- Suspenseful
- Creepy
- Haunted
- In a paranoid state
- Frozen in fear
- In the vague uncertainty between sane and insane.

# CONFLICT

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## Primary:

- Man vs. Man → The Narrator vs. the Old Man (and his eye)
- Man vs. Self → The narrator verses his own sanity, panic & paranoia

## Secondary:

- Man vs. Self → The old man vs. his fear in the late darkness of his room

# RESOLUTION

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- The Narrator confesses to his crime & reveals the body buried beneath the wood planks.

# MAJOR CHARACTERS

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- The narrator
- The old man

# MINOR CHARACTERS

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- The Police officers

# THEME

## (underlying message)

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Possible answers:

- Your mind can keep you in a prison that's worse than the one behind bars.
- You are your own worst enemy.
- Sanity is in the "eye" of the beholder. (*hardy-har-har*)



# POINT OF VIEW

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- 1<sup>st</sup> person narration
  - Unreliable narrator?
  - The story is told in a flashback

# INTRODUCTION

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- The narrator wants to show that he is not insane, and offers a story as proof.
- In that story, the **initial situation** is the narrator's decision to kill the old man so that the man's eye will stop 'preying on' the narrator ("like a vulture").

# RISING ACTION

- The narrator goes to the old man's room every night for a week, ready to fulfill his task of killing the old man.
- But, the sleeping man won't open his eye. Since the eye, (not the man) is the problem, the narrator can't seem to muster up the courage to kill him if the offending eye isn't open. (That's also why the narrator doesn't/ "cant'" kill the old man during the day.)
- The narrator makes a noise while spying on the old man, and the man wakes up – and opens his eye.
- The narrator feels additionally "crazed" when he hears the beating of (what he thinks is) the old man's heart. Out of fear that it's loud enough to draw the attention of neighbors, the narrator quickly reacts...

# CLIMAX

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## *Murder...*

- The narrator kills the old man (lunges at him, drags him onto the floor, and smothers him with the mattress)
- Then cuts up the body (& drains the blood in the tub) and hides it under the bedroom floor.

# FALLING ACTION

*Ut oh, the Po-Po are here!*

- The Police drop by, investigating a neighbor's concern after reporting to have heard a "shriek" in the night.
- The narrator is pretty calm, collected and in fact, overly confident.
- When the police first show up, he gives them the guided tour of the house, explains that the old man is out on vacation & then invites them to sit and chat. As an example of his extreme pride & comfort, the narrator even sits his own chair directly above where the old man's body is hidden.
- But then, the narrator starts to hear a terrible noise, which gets louder and louder ... until the narrator can't take it anymore.

# CONCLUSION

- Finally, after determining (in his own mind) that the noise *MUST* be coming from under the floor boards, and that the Police officers *MUST* also be hearing the noise (but mocking the narrator by pretending that they don't), the narrator "snaps"...
- And confesses. He tears up the floor boards, revealing the hidden body of the old man; thus, confessing his crime.
- Or...

... Or, did the “heart” “tell” his  
“tale” for him instead????

(Something to think about...)

“Tell-Tale Heart” by Edgar Allan Poe.  
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